



BACKGROUND

The original SPP project started in Vancouver in 2003, as a way to address unemployment and create further local economic growth in the Downtown EastSide, a neighbourhood in Vancouver's inner city. In partnership with *PATH Employability Centre* and the *EEC (Employment Exchange Committee)*, *SEED Winnipeg* launched a local SPP in 2004. The goals were similar – to see “Economic and employment opportunities result from directing existing business purchases to local businesses and social enterprises, which hire those who face barriers to employment” (homepage: www.sppwinnipeg.org).

In 2008, the SPP took a break from the social purchasing scene, but is back in action with generous funding from *Neighbourhoods Alive!* and the *Winnipeg Regeneration Strategy (WRS)*. Adopted in 2010 by Local Investment Toward Employment (LITE), the SPP supports LITE's mission "to promote community economic development by supporting inner-city initiatives in Winnipeg that build capacity and provide jobs".

HOW DOES THE SPP WORK?

SUPPLIERS

Suppliers of goods and services connect with the SPP Coordinator to see if their business would be a good fit for the portal. There are two possible streams into which a business can fit: **'Employment'** or **'Social Purpose'**. Each stream requires a different commitment from the new partner, depending on the structure and capacity of their business.

Suppliers which fall into the *Employment* category must commit to posting job openings with the SPP, and to giving a first look at résumés from employment agency clients (*EEC - Employment Exchange Committee*) who face multiple barriers to finding and maintaining a job.

Suppliers which are not able to fulfill this criteria (due to size and business type) have the chance to be listed under the *Social Purpose* category of partners. Such businesses might include family-owned and operated social enterprises, small worker co-ops, etc. These partners must meet the criteria of **active practice and promotion** of the **Neechi CED Principles** (<http://www.ccednet-rcdec.ca/en/node/4539>).

This new possibility from the SPP will allow for an expanded base of suppliers that offer great services with a social value, even if they are not at the capacity to actively promote employment opportunities within their own business.

Each category of supplier signs a 'letter of commitment' to the SPP principles, and agrees to offer consistent feedback on how this commitment is demonstrated and supported in their business practices.

Supplier Benefits:

- Connect to new corporate and non-profit purchasers who are looking to add social value to the quality of their regular buying habits.
Increased demand for goods and services = a growing and sustainable business
- Connect to the individual in the general public who is looking to make a purchase that supports local employment and businesses with a social value emphasis
- Strengthen community and the local economy by hiring employment agency pre-screened clients who may face multiple barriers to getting a job (i.e. long-term unemployed, Newcomer immigrants and refugees, youth).
- Receive promotion and advertising through SPP newsletter profiles, events, and networking opportunities.

PURCHASERS

Purchasers play a vital role within the SPP. By redirecting their buying power, partners such as corporate business bodies, non-profits, government departments, and the general public have the chance to support opportunities for local employment and social responsibility.

On a regular basis, these partners require goods & services such as catering, promotional supplies, cleaning, etc. By making purchases from SPP supplier partners, purchaser partners are still choosing products based upon quality, price, and service. The difference is the assurance that they are also clearly contributing to the local economy – both in terms of a financial and social impact. Supporting a local catering business which itself supports local farmers and small enterprises, has a direct impact on the growth of the caterer, upon the growth of other suppliers, and upon the ability to create opportunities for employment.

More Purchaser Benefits:

- Receive promotional incentives from SPP supplier partners. Monthly specials or discounts reserved only for SPP purchasers, are a great way to try out new local businesses and services and save a bit of money at the same time.
- Fulfill your business or organization's Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) principles
- The SPP website advertises each purchaser by clearly posting their logo, and by profiling partners on the site and in the SPP newsletter. These profiles and logos demonstrate a value-filled commitment on the part of the purchaser, and serves as a transparent dedication visible to other businesses and organizations, and most importantly, a clear demonstration to the general public.

THE 'PORTAL'

Essentially, the Social Purchasing Portal acts as a business-to-business connecting tool. 'Portal' simply refers to the website directory itself, a centralized way to search for socially purposed Winnipeg business services. Suppliers are placed into various directory categories such as *Specialty Gifts*, *Health & Well-Being*, *Computer Services*, etc., depending on the services offered. It is also possible for some businesses such as cafés or restaurants to be listed under a few different categories (e.g. *Catering*, *Bookstores*) due to the supplier's multiple options for goods and services. The Portal is open to partners making purchases for their own organization or company, as well as the individual in the general public who wishes to redirect their own buying habits. It's possible to be both a business partner and an individual partner of the SPP at the same time!

Suppliers also use the Portal to post job openings at their business. The posting is emailed to the *Employment Exchange Committee* coordinator who then distributes the employment opening to *EEC* agency members. The job opening is distributed to pre-screened agency clients who possess the matching required skillset for the position.

EMPLOYMENT

The main purpose of the SPP is to foster and strengthen employment opportunities for those job-seekers who may face multiple barriers to finding and maintaining steady employment. A vital support is the supplier commitment to give these job-seekers a chance to apply for positions ahead of the general public. This support not only reaches the individuals, but also the community and local economy. Local supplier initiative and involvement is of utmost importance in understanding the skillsets of potential employees, and offering life-changing opportunities to job-seekers.

Benefits of hiring employment agency clients:

1. Position applicants are pre-screened and matched to positions:

PATH Employability Centre is connected to more than 20 other employment agencies throughout the city such as *Employment Projects of Winnipeg* and *Winnipeg Transition Centre*. Upon receiving a job posting through the SPP website or coordinator, the *PATH* coordinator will pass along the postings to partner agencies. Each of the agencies pre-screens clients and determines the best match between the strengths of job-seekers and the positions posted by a supplier partner.

2. Strong relationships:

The SPP Coordinator and *PATH* Employment Coordinator keep connected to the supplier and job-seeker to ensure a successful application and interview process, and maintain this relationship after a potential applicant has been hired.

3. Viewpoint of the Purchaser

When considering purchasing from a local business, price is not always the only bottom line for the corporate body or public individual. The values of a supplier business can also influence a purchaser partner's decisions about buying habits. A purchaser may well choose one business over another if that supplier demonstrates a commitment to the social economy as well as the capital economy. Signing on as an SPP supplier sends a clear message of responsibility and excellent business ethics to the purchasing partner and general public.

BENEFITS TO ALL PARTNERS

The benefits to both purchaser and supplier partners of the former SPP are clear. The large law firm **Taylor McCaffrey LLP** has been a supportive purchaser partner since the project's inception. Mea Ramm, the firm's General Manager, explains how *Taylor McCaffrey* uses its purchasing power towards local suppliers – "We thought the concept of the SPP was great and wanted to help the businesses who in turn helped the community. We continue to use some of the suppliers that we've met through the portal because they provide great products and great service."

One of those suppliers of "great products and great service" is **Food For Thought**, a North End catering company that focuses on homestyle meals incorporated with local and organic ingredients. Melanie Rushton from *Food For Thought*, notes how the SPP has definitely "...helped the business [FFT's] with both purchasing and referrals", but she also expresses support for other small and local suppliers. When asked what she liked most about the SPP, Melanie replied, "Seeing my peers growing and succeeding in their businesses!"

THE FUTURE

The Social Purchasing Portal of Winnipeg is a tremendous tool for strengthening businesses, community, employment, and the local economy.

The SPP's success depends upon continual and consistent relationship-building, commemorating successes and meeting challenges as they arise. With this focus, partners will begin to build and rebuild positive and lasting business connections, and engage the advantages of being part of a central social purchasing and small business network in Winnipeg.

